

B and I were both excited to get back into the cave and get to work. I figured with about 4 hours work we could be in and see what was on the other side. We had arranged to borrow a DeWalt cordless drill to bring with us. We also had masonry bits to drill with, sledge hammers (two) to break up the rock, bullpins to insert into the drill holes, and a few other tools that we ended up not using. Getting the tools down to the work site proved to be a challenge. One of us would climb down the rope and stop at a ledge or good resting place, then the other person would lower the tools. We kept repeating this routine until we got to the bottom of the cave. Then we had to drag the tools to the hole. It took about an hour to finally get to work.

B took the first turn at the hole. After an hour of exhausting work we could tell that we were not going to get through in one session. We kept trading off after we worked ourselves into a sweat. One would take a break and get some food and water while the other one went to work.

The routine went like this:

To begin work we had to get down on our knees and do our best to avoid smacking our heads on the ceiling. Working in this awkward position we would drill into the wall around the hole. That was difficult work. We really had to push on the drill, and it was still slow progress. Then we inserted the bullpin into the hole and hammered on it until the rock broke up. Then we would repeat the process. To give you an idea of how slow it went, the typical size rock that would break off was about fingernail size. If we broke off a large piece (about 1/3 the size of my palm) it was cause for celebration.

From time to time, for variety, we would just wail on a cold chisel with a 5-lb. sledge. It was slow progress. The problem with the sledge was that we couldn't take a good swing because of the tight quarters.

*Even though we spent many hours and several trips working on the hole we never did find a better technique for widening the*

*hole. The drill/bullpin/hammer got the best results for our efforts. We came up with some crazy ideas for breaking up the rock. Everything from TNT (never seriously considered) to hauling a generator to the mouth of the cave and running an extension cord down to a jack hammer. We even thought about using liquid nitrogen to freeze the rock and make it more brittle!*

After a couple hours of hard work we realized what our limiting factor was going to be. It was about then that our first battery met an abrupt death. We had a second battery, so we swapped them out. The second battery lasted a little longer because we hammered and chiseled a little more often and a little longer each time. Finally, after about three more hours of drudgery the second battery died and we called it a night. Whew! We could tell that we had done some work in the cave, but it was not much. For the first time since we got in the cave we sat back both of us took a break. It was nice to check out the results of our hard work. Then we noticed the howling again. It seemed to be a little louder than the last time we were there. We just figured the wind was blowing a little stronger outside. What we could not figure out was the rumbling. It, too, seemed to be louder, and more frequent. This time we could not attribute the noise to trucks. The road that the trucks drove on was not very busy to begin with. At that time of night it should be dead. Yet the rumbling continued. It seemed to be coming from deep within the passage. B said he would ask some veteran cavers what could be causing the noise.

We didn't spend a long time admiring our work. We still had to haul the gear up and out of the cave. Actually we left some of it in the cave. It was still difficult work. What made it worse was that we were both exhausted. Our original plan was to be done with this cave and hit a couple of other caves in the area the next day. Instead we decided to crash at a nearby motel, charge up the drill batteries, and go back to Mystery Cave.

*My journal goes on at length about the night after we left the cave: We got a room, dinner was excellent, I didn't sleep good despite the fact I was exhausted, etc. We both slept in so we got a late start back into the cave. The*

*second day working on the cave went about the same as the first. We worked until both batteries were dead again. We were still not even close to getting through.*

*The howling and rumbling continued as the day before.*